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**Retrofitting Greyfields:
Strategies and Placemaking for Suburban Retail**

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by

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Report

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Abstract

Retrofitting Greyfields: Strategies and Placemaking for Suburban Retail

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One of the defining features on 20th century American cityscapes is the rise and subsequent fall of auto-oriented suburban retail centers. The indoor mall and suburban strip center were once ubiquitous facets of suburban life, but in many places their lifespan and popularity have reached an end and are now referred to as “greyfields.”

The purpose of this report will seek to document and explain the rise, fall and ultimate methods of regeneration of suburban, auto-oriented retail centers. This report will examine two case studies, Mizner Plaza (Boca Raton, FL) and Washingtonian Center (Gaithersburg, MD), to demonstrate the larger narrative of suburban shopping center redevelopment approaches.

This report will need to articulate the birth, life cycle, and decline of the suburban, auto-oriented retail center using established shopping center and greyfield literature. The report will be comprised of three parts with the first outlining the characteristics,

challenges and indicators of failing “greyfield” retail centers. The second part of this report will explore three types of greyfield redevelopment strategies (as anticipated through findings):

- a. New placemaking (the lifestyle, town center approach).
- b. New development improvements.
- c. An adaptive reuse of existing facilities.

Thirdly, considering these three types of strategies, suggestions for redevelopment will be recommended for the Gateway shopping center, a declining “big box” power center in Austin, Texas.

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Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU), in conjunction with PriceWaterhouse Cooper (PWC) sought to catalogue and identify failing malls and the various attempts to revitalize them. The report coined the new vernacular of “greyfields” to describe redevelopment sites that cannot be categorized by the established characteristics of brownfield or greenfield sites. Brownfield sites are contaminated, previously used urban sites, and greenfields are undeveloped rural land; greyfield sites stand apart in that they are previously developed sites that are immediately suitable for redevelopment (CNU et al, 2001, pg. 1).

The original report conducted by PWC and the CNU focused explicitly on abandoned or failing regional malls which were characterized by at least 350,000 sq. feet of leasable space and a minimum of 35 stores. This initial report was noted, and later critiqued by the International Council of Shopping Centers for not being more applicable to other types of greyfield retail sites (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2001). This paper will pick up where the PWC/CNU report left off by exploring redevelopment opportunities for the other various types of suburban greyfield centers, such as strip malls, big box stores and power centers.

The CNU defines greyfield malls as retail properties that require both public and private investment to curb decline and initiate redevelopment. Using this context, this report will take some liberty with the current definition of a greyfield mall and expand upon it to refer to a number of large retail property types (CNU et al, 2001, pg. 1). For the

purposes of this paper, the singular term “greyfield” will connote and integrate two definitions – a suburban shopping center and a greyfield mall.

First, this paper adapts the long-standing definition of a suburban shopping center, as provided by Edgar Horwood as early as 1958. Horwood defined a suburban shopping center as three essential components:

1. A predesigned group of retail outlets of sufficient over-all size to provide a broad range of goods and services for the major needs of suburban living. It caters essentially to the weekly shopping trip and convenience-type purchases.
2. An integrated entity, providing adequate off-street parking and with the commercial outlets arranged in a functional relationship to each other. Usually the suburban branch of a central department store is the nucleus of the center, with a cluster of specialty stores around it. Smaller centers often contain a junior department store in lieu of a suburban branch of a major department store.
3. Unified control of the land and its development by a single development or management corporation, with leases to the individual outlets based on a percentage of the gross retail sales.
(Horwood, 1958).

This early definition of a shopping center was streamlined and codified by the Community Builders Council of the Urban Land Institute who then defined a shopping center as:

A group of architecturally unified commercial establishments built on a site that is planned, developed, owned, and managed as an operating unit related in its location, size, and type of shops to the trade area that it serves. The unit provides on-site parking in definite relationship to the types and total size of the stores (Casazza & Spink, 1985, pg. 1).

Secondly, we examine the standing definition of a greyfield mall. In their original assessment of greyfield malls, the CNU and PWC report categorized the state of malls into four economic assessment classifications: greyfield, vulnerable, viable and healthy.

This report rounds out its definition of greyfield by including the parameters prescribed previously for ‘greyfields’ and ‘vulnerable’ malls. Translated for non-mall retail centers, the term greyfield will also imply a shopping center built or renovated before 1992 with 70 stores or less (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2001).

The vast majority of literature concerning greyfield sites, focuses on underutilized, auto-oriented malls; however, it is reasonable to assume that the same principles and challenges facing greyfield mall sites are applicable, if not identical, to the auto-oriented suburban strip mall (referred to as power centers in larger instances).

Peter Calthorpe articulates a definitional transition from ‘shopping center’ to a more simplified definition of a greyfield shopping center by defining greyfields as being “low density commercial zones known for their relentless surface parking lots and single-story buildings” (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001, pg. 204). Calthorpe reinforces the proposal of this paper by explaining that “old mall and commercial centers, normally twenty to forty acres, can become new village or town centers with a more complete mix of retail, employment and housing” (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001, pg. 204). This notion will be expanded further in the following chapters.

With the central themes of function, redevelopment potential, parking and retail layout, and development ownership established, the more contemporary and relevant definition of ‘greyfield’ finds some context. In order to establish this paper’s working definition of greyfield retail centers, we must borrow and expand upon existing definitions for traditional greyfield (indoor) malls. This traditional definition includes the point that greyfields will have a lower occupancy rate than non-greyfield (“healthy”)

retail centers; the explicit rate is 84% or less than versus 90%+ for non-greyfield centers (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2001, pg. 13). Additionally, there must be a precedent in physical size to deem a site a greyfield because economies of size are necessary for multi-use redevelopment. The average standards for greyfield mall sites are approximately “45 acres or 500,000 (and less than) square feet of gross leasable area” (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2001, pg. 5). These rough physical and economic parameters will be used as our metric for determining non-mall greyfield sites as well.

Lastly, this paper acknowledges the rapid pace of change within the retail development industry and thus attempts to anticipate redevelopment needs for the most current retail trend. Consequently, this paper’s definition of a greyfield must include the modern incarnation of the commercial strip, the power center. These centers are described as the penultimate “hypersuburban form...[being] 100 percent auto oriented, megascaled, single use, and remote” (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001, pg. 206). With a new definition for failing or obsolete suburban shopping centers, one based on physical and economic characteristics, we can explore the problems and solutions for the greyfield.

The Greyfield Problem

The central question then emerges, why do we need to fix greyfields? They must be addressed because we understand that the problems greyfields present are serious concerns for the communities they are in. Consequences and lost opportunity are the only possible outcomes for continued neglect.

In answering this question, the cause of the problem must be examined. First, there is the dilemma of retail center evolution. As the retail experience has shifted from downtowns, to strip centers, to malls, to power centers, we are now seeing shifts from the big box (power center) as well. Retailers are updating their mode of delivering the consumer experience from the classic big box to the larger, superstore typology with no end to the process in sight (Christensen, 2008, pg. 16). These power centers draw from a market area of up to seven miles, “cannibalizing” local smaller stores with little regard to neighborhood scale and aesthetic. Comprising the power center is typically a collection of big box stores; bare bone, replicable buildings ranging in size from 20,000 to 280,000 square feet, sharing massive parking lots (Christensen, 2008). The ubiquity of the power center implies the growing problem of a placeless, suburban America.

Resulting from each new phase in retail evolution, the latest model in retailing becomes derelict, leaving gaping holes in our urban fabric. Adding to this problem, not only is the evolution fast paced, it is also predatory. New shopping centers are not necessarily built to accommodate new or growing demand, but instead are built to steal a share of demand from existing retailers (Duany et al, 2000).

Secondly, adding to the complexity in answering the greyfield dilemma is the problem of retail categorization within planning. In an earlier work on planner and consumer preferences to retail typologies, authors Howe and Rabiega admit “neither planners nor consumers... exhibit[ed] a clear idea of what [commercial] centers or strips are or what each form should offer” (Howe and Rabiega, 1992, pg 219). Howe and Rabiega’s work also exposes a very important point in planners’ preferences and biases in regards to retail zoning. We find that planners prefer center-based hierarchical retailing as opposed to un-nucleated strip development. Evidenced through their qualitative findings, Howe and Rabiega noted that planners reinforced this retail structure preference with a strong disliking of the physical appearance of commercial strips (which the consumer qualitative findings also agreed with) (Howe and Rabiega, 1992). With hope, the updated characterizations of suburban shopping centers and definition of a greyfield in this paper will add some clarity to this issue.

Without any reinvestment or revitalization efforts, greyfield sites languish, becoming not just visual blight, but a loss to a city’s tax base, job base and an underutilization of valuable land. Examining regional malls alone, by 2003, the CNU had identified that up to 7% of malls already existed as greyfields and that another 12% were susceptible to decline (Bodzin, 2003). The abundance of failing malls, and even further reaching implications for other suburban retail centers, are an economic and physical ailment that cannot be ignored.

Furthermore, what is important to note, is that malls and shopping centers were never designed to be permanent economic engines that central business districts are.

Suburban shopping centers lack the wide variety of housing, jobs, and transportation options that have come to characterize a downtown. Retail centers have evolved linearly, still predominately containing only retail uses. This single use notion becomes extremely problematic when subjected to the congestion, changing trends and particularly, retail recessions; conditions which only exacerbate a shopping center's decline.

Why are Greyfields ripe for redevelopment?

Aging bedroom communities and first ring suburbs are rapidly becoming, if they are not already, landlocked. Strip centers and suburban shopping malls have “outlived their economic life and market value” but continue to be subjugated to competition from outlying retail centers and the existence of single-use low-density zoning (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001, pg. 205). Greyfields, however, represent the greatest opportunity for towns and suburbs. These sites are increasingly centrally located, easily accessible, eyesores that present little public opposition. Lastly, greyfields present the greatest opportunity because “retail is the fastest changing segment of the development industry” (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001, pg. 205). In the short term, opportunities for greyfield redevelopment include construction jobs, preservation and use of existing infrastructure. In the long term, redevelopment and reinvestment will offer increased property taxes, sales tax, office and retail employment, housing (if included in the strategy) and a renewed sense of place (Bodzin, 2003).

Concerning greyfield redevelopment, one underlying metric of success for suburban communities has emerged. As Calthorpe declares, “transforming the...apron of parking lots is not only an opportunity; it is the signature of the maturation of the suburbs” (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001, pg. 208). Greyfields have all the trademarks of conditions ripe for redevelopment; they have the space, the size, an established demographic area, and the ever-improving advantage of location.

Chapter 2:

HISTORY OF SUBURBAN RETAIL

The modern day suburban commercial shopping center, (known as several variations, from power center, strip center, lifestyle center, etc), all trace their common origins to the “real estate patterns along streetcar streets that ran through residential neighborhoods,” which created a new type of linear development (Bartnett, 1989, pg. 132). This linear type of commercial development endured and became engrained in planning even as the streetcar networks evaporated. While retail’s history may clearly be traced to a pre-automobile era, the commercial strip center is now solely defined by its accessibility and dependence upon the automobile.

While many point to Country Club Plaza in Kansas City as the genesis of the modern shopping center, it is technically, a shopping district. It is bifurcated by several public streets, with on-street and garage parking spread across several blocks. To trace the origins of the modern American shopping center, we observe Highland Park Shopping Village in Dallas. Highland Park Shopping Village epitomizes the modern shopping center because the site is singular, unbisected by public streets, and most importantly maintained by a singular owner, who also controls the center’s appearance and parking (Casazza & Spink, 1985). Concerning the trajectory of American retailing in the 20th century, many observers had already realized during the interwar years that the old central business districts, many of which had aged without adequate reinvestment, were clearly at risk as newer districts developed further out in the city. These problems

were compounded, starting in the 1950's, by competition in the form of large-scale suburban shopping malls (Bruegmann, 2005).

By the middle of the 20th century, as consumers became dependent and inseparable from their cars, traffic congestion and parking problems discouraged commercial expansion in central business districts of cities and towns which were already hindered by a short supply of developable space. Attempting to reach out to the growing number of suburbanites, merchandisers at first built stores along the new highways in commercial “strips” that consumers could easily reach by car. By the mid 1950s, commercial developers, many of whom owned department stores, were constructing a new kind of marketplace; the regional shopping center aimed at satisfying suburbanites’ consumption and community needs (Cohen, 1996). These new shopping centers were “strategically located at highway intersections or along the busiest thoroughfares,” aiming at a demographic within a half an hour drive, and who could “come by car, park in the abundant lots provided, and then proceed on foot” (Cohen, 1996, pg 1052).

The first generation of the suburban shopping mall began with Northgate Mall in Seattle in 1950, an open-air mall anchored by a full line department store. The 1950s in suburban America saw the birth of standardized successful practices and innovations for shopping center planning; “the shopping center became recognized as a distinct building and land use type” (Casazza & Spink, 1985, pg. 13). Northgate ushered in a new era for the shopping center; the mall and centralized shopping center idea proliferated and evolved quickly with the continued rapid suburbanization taking place in the 1950s and 1960s.

The ideal, even with these early malls, was still the creation of centrally located public space that brought together commercial and civic activity. Victor Gruen, one of the most prominent and articulate shopping-center developers, spoke for many others when he argued that shopping centers offered dispersed suburban populations “crystallization points for suburbia’s community life... by affording opportunities for social life and recreation in a protected pedestrian environment, by incorporating civic and educational facilities, shopping centers can fill an existing void” (Cohen, 1996, pg. 1056). Not only did Gruen and others promote the construction of community centers in the atomized landscape of suburbia, but in appearance their earliest shopping centers idealized, almost romanticized, “the physical plan of the traditional downtown shopping street, with stores lining both sides of an open-air pedestrian walkway that was landscaped and equipped with benches” (Cohen, 1996, pg. 1056).

One of the central arguments, or selling points, of these new shopping centers, was that they were centrally owned and managed, allowing for a central administration or ownership entity to calculate and provide for the perfect mix of stores and their placement, aiming to meet customers’ diverse needs and maximizing store owners’ profits. From an aesthetic and architectural standpoint, early shopping center models reflected traditional downtowns with a pedestrianized outdoor walkway – a nod to main streets; and all design and graphics within the shopping center were kept under strict control by the centralized management (Cohen, 1996, pg. 1056).

Since the 1970’s more than half of all new commercial and retail development has occurred on the fringes of metropolitan areas or in suburban locations (Barnett 1989).

Much of this new development, as Jonathan Barnett explains, occurs in these suburban areas which may be unincorporated or even small towns where there is little in terms of oversight and experience for large scale retail development. As a result, the de facto “primary design determinant has been commercial strip zoning,” a development concept Barnett points out that is “ludicrously inadequate to the task” (Barnett, 1989, pg. 131). Despite suburbs’ and towns’ inexperience in zoning and planning for large-scale retail centers, the popularity of malls swelled.

By the 1980’s, most suburban markets had reached the saturation point for new mall and shopping center development. The economic slowdown of the early part of the decade contained and limited the rampant growth of the retail industry, aiding to the fact that the shopping center industry had reached maturity (Casazza & Spink, 1985). Rather than costly renovations or redevelopment of aging malls, the shopping center industry turned to a growing (and cheaper) niche- the discount and outlet store, an early predecessor to the ‘big box.’

In an adaptation of its predecessor, “traditional strip malls were suddenly heralded as ideal for time-pressed modern shoppers, since they allowed motorists to drive within a few feet of a store, jump out and make a few quick purchases, then get back on the road to another destination” (Davis, 1997, pg. 103) In true keeping with its social context, “the time-saving appeal of strip malls was cast as increasingly significant given the rapid growth of two-worker and one-person households” (Davis, 1997, pg. 103).

The big box and power center phenomenon of the late 1980’s, 90’s and into the 2000’s has been an exclusively suburban one. Driven by growing consumer demand for

value, discount, and efficiency, big box stores became larger and cheaper to construct, sacrificing aesthetic appeal and site/context consideration for the economic bottom line. Beyond the physical changes big box and power centers brought to the suburban landscape, these shopping centers “altered the perceptions of land use and density and exacerbated the challenges of traffic congestions and circulation within [the suburbs]” (Booth et al, 2001, pg. 110). Additionally, and most relevant to the creation of greyfields, was that the proliferation of these cheap big boxes and power centers flooded an already saturated retail market; supply vastly outpaced demand leading to decreases in rents, increases in vacancy “and the functional obsolescence of existing retail space” (Booth et al, 2001, pg. 110).

Expediting this process, big box power centers often cannibalize themselves. As we have now established, the shopping center development industry quickly evolves and fine tunes it’s modeling; the big box power center is no exception to this rule. New models and technologies lead to the closure of relatively new stores, leaving even newer shopping centers susceptible to decline and the inevitable greyfield.

Chapter 3:

REDEVELOPMENT APPROACHES

Place Making is Key

With an updated definition of greyfields, an understanding of the problem, and a historical footing, this paper now shifts to its central focus- redevelopment strategies for greyfield sites.

The traditional band-aid response for failing retail centers time and time again has been superficial upgrades and façade changes. However, Mark Eppli, a retail researcher at George Washington University in Washington, DC, says that conventional renovations will not be sufficient to breathe new life into many properties. “A face-lift isn’t going to do much to help. A new anchor store, depending on the center’s position in the market, may not do much either” (Congress for the New Urbanism, PriceWaterhouseCoopers & Sobel, 2001). Because most suburban shopping centers are not meant to be permanent economic and social gathering points for the community, “investments in remodeling and expansion can help recapture some of [their] earl[ier] glory,” but these types of improvements will only deter decline temporarily (Bodzin, 2003). Long-term, permanent fixes for greyfield retail centers will require substantially more investment, planning and vision.

One of the principle advocates for greyfield redevelopment utilizing the principles of new urbanism has been the Congress for the New Urbanism. The essential elements of new urbanism, namely being mixed-use, walkable, and transit-oriented, are crucial for the success of any greyfield redevelopment. Steven Bodzin explains that the “failed urban

renewal malls of the past [showed] cities and towns that they must emphasize their strengths, rather than compete on the suburbs' terms," adding that "[concerning] greyfields, [this] means creating a real downtown or neighborhood, rather than trying to compete with the box stores" (Bodzin, 2003). Within the context of new urbanism, what this boils down to is essentially the introduction of placemaking.

Abandoned shopping centers and big box power centers, as we have noted, have become commonplace in our suburbs, reaching the saturation point not only in market share, but also in consumer and resident interest. These typical types of shopping centers look the same whether they are in Tulsa or Toledo, making the suburban landscape of one place, look just the same as another. People crave a sense of place, because memorable places appeal to our senses and sense of community. In order to reclaim our suburban shopping centers, and in economic terms, reclaim the values that have been lost to decline, greyfields must incorporate a sense of place into their redevelopment model.

In real estate terms, well-conceptualized developments in coordinated environments are worth more and have higher returns than big boxes with parking lot seas, a fact the ULI calls the "design dividend" (Beyard & Pawlukiewicz, 2001). The crucial elements to this type of placemaking, according to the CNU and the principles of new urbanism are as follows:

- Shopping center evolves from a single structure into a district with a variety of buildings and uses.
- The street pattern connects with the streets of the surrounding community.
- The new project architecturally meshes with surrounding buildings
- Activity on the site faces the street, not an internal corridor. Streets become the property's main civic space.
- Parking is in multilevel structures.

- Land uses are integrated both horizontally and vertically.
- A network of interior streets breaks up the site into blocks of similar size to those in the surrounding neighborhood.
- Construction is phased so the developer can make the necessary short-term money while working toward the town's long-term vision.
- Real public space creates a sense of place, identity, and community.
(Bodzin, 2003)

The Urban Land Institute has also been an advocate for the creation of 'place' in suburban communities. The following expand and parallel the principles of the CNU.

They are a few of the most adaptable and useful guidelines for placemaking at greyfield sites:

- The introduction of landscaping elements (trees, shrubs, native plantings) to enhance the place but not deter from retail sight lines.
- Create attractive, wide sidewalks and pathways to enhance and secure the pedestrian experience and afford new opportunities to increase retail spending.
- Vary roofscape and façade designs; diversity in architecture over monotony.
- Design attractive corners and gateways to the development nodes.
- Adding streetscape vitality- requires active uses along sidewalks, achieved through window displays, entertainment, architectural elements, styles and setbacks.
- Surround big boxes with "sleeves" of retail and service uses to minimize blank walls and dead spaces.
- Provide community services and a variety of retail needs and choices encountered.
- Create a distinct place-making tool kit that includes townscape elements such as narrow streets to foster the creation of community destinations along the strip.
(Beyard and Pawlukiewicz, 2001).

Greyfields, and soon-to-be greyfields, such as power centers and big box retail stores lack aesthetic appeal, community identity, a sense of place and the incorporation of public place and domain, elements which are essential to community building and placemaking (Booth et al, 2001). A sense of place, recreational appeal and community,

qualities that are appealing to the newest demographic generation, are manifesting into a very new and specific model for shopping center development.

The Introduction of Mixed-Use/Housing

In order to solve the problem with greyfields, our traditional planning models of single use zoning must be reevaluated. The retail development world does not, and cannot exist as an island on its own. The ultimate success, or failure, of a suburban retail development is tied to its locale and the demographics it serves.

It should be no surprise then that residential development inherently has the greatest impact on suburban shopping centers. The problem for greyfield sites however, is that these shopping centers are often cut off from the residential neighborhoods they should serve. Andres Duany explains the paradox of suburban planning, one that creates a vastly different meaning to adjacency and accessibility.

In single-use zoning, the typical model for suburban planning, zoning typology, services, and amenities are physically separated and distinct from one another, providing little options in the way of living and housing options (Duany et al, 2000). Because developers are forced to separate land uses, a shopping center may be physically next to a residential subdivision, but will have no direct access (via street/sidewalk connections) to it, forcing residents to drive. Consequently, this perpetuates the need for substantial parking and infrastructure. The Urban Land Institute expands upon the problems of single use zoning and the consequences it wrecks on the suburban landscape:

Traditional Euclidean zoning – with its separate districts for each land use and relatively low density of overall development – and the suburbs’ lack of transit options have combined to increase dependence on the automobile while choking local streets and highways (Booth et al, 2001, pg. 112).

The introduction of mixed uses to the suburban landscape offers a vastly different alternative to the antiquated, unappealing auto-oriented single use zoning of suburban greyfields. In terms of the rejuvenation of these failing shopping centers, what mixed-use begs for most is the introduction and inclusion of residential elements.

The value of the retail-housing combination is becoming more and more apparent; “almost all projects where [Congress for New Urbanism] found a mall being redeveloped [included] housing” (Bodzin, 2003). Housing in mixed-use centers offers an element of living choice to suburban residents and “retailers like nearby housing because it provides a stable body of customers and puts life on the streets, attracting more customers” (Bodzin, 2003). In nearly every greyfield redevelopment case study the CNU studied, it was found that the introduction of housing was not only an element, but that “at projects where housing [build out was] complete, developers uniformly complain[ed] that more should have been included” (Bodzin, 2003).

At this point it is appropriate to refer to a working definition of what constitutes a mixed-use development. The Urban Land Institute has defined mixed-use developments as having the following characteristics:

1. Three or more significant revenue-producing uses (such as retail, office, residential, hotel/motel and recreation), which, in well-planned projects, are mutually supporting;
 2. significant functional and physical integration of project components (and thus a highly intensive use of land), including uninterrupted pedestrian connections; and
 3. development conforming to a coherent plan (which frequently stipulates the type and scale of uses, permitted densities, and related items).
- (Witherspoon et al, 1976, pg. 6)

By the 1980s, the ULI had already noted a trend towards mixed-use development, not only in urban areas, but reaching existing suburban shopping centers as well. The ULI prophesized at the time that as shopping centers matured and evolved, many were likely to transform into multi-use developments with wide-ranging forms and scales (Casazza, 1985).

Parking and the Automobile

One of the key characteristics, albeit a necessary one for most suburban shopping locations, is the existence of ample parking. The parking lot has dominated the suburban shopping center and strip because its existence has been predicated on the idea of free and plentiful parking; adding to this notion is the conventional practice which requires every development to provide for its own parking needs (often located between the roadway and building structure) (Beyard & Pawlukiewicz, 2001). The importance of parking to investors and retail developers is hard to understate. The ULI, in its definition of a shopping center, states:

Sufficient on-site parking to meet the demands generated by the retail commercial uses. Parking should be arranged to distribute customer pedestrian traffic to the maximum advantage for retail shopping and to provide acceptable walking distances from parked cars to center entrances and to the individual stores (Casazza et al, 1985, pg. 2).

The importance of parking also becomes apparent when considering that the shopping center industry utilizes a “parking index”, a comparison of the parking demand of customers and shopping area (recommended 4-5 spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross leasable area) in determining the appropriate number of parking spaces for a shopping center (Casazza et al, 1985). In other words, there is an industry minimum, which translates to shopping centers marketability and ultimate success. Clearly, parking will be a difficult element to do away with completely, yet there are more responsible methods of approaching this necessity.

The problem with traditional parking lots for retail is their orientation and scale in front of buildings. Damaging the pedestrian experience, parking lots are designed to

appeal to suburban drivers, seeking quick access at the expense of locals who wish to walk to stores (Duany et al, 2000).

The Urban Land Institute has devised a set of principles in order to address the matter of parking as a part of the greater matter of auto access and traffic in redeveloping urban shopping centers:

- Size prime parking lots and structures for reasonable demand; provide for peak parking in overflow areas.
 - Encourage and plan for shared parking among adjacent uses.
 - Consider the creation of a parking district to bring multiple facilities under common management and create greater efficiencies.
 - Look for alternative parking and building configurations that provide convenience and avoid visual blight.
 - Create parking in a carefully designed landscape.
 - Where land prices are higher, introduce structured parking- opening up surface parking lots for redevelopment.
 - Avoid charging for parking. It is inconsistent with the nature of a strip center and is likely to be effective only in exceptional circumstances.
- (Beyard and Pawlukiewicz, 2001).

Considering the importance of parking, it goes without saying that auto access to suburban shopping centers will need to be addressed and improved until alternatives (such as the urban maturation of the area, or the introduction of alternative transportation) can be provided. There are methods, however, of improving automobile access while refocusing on the pedestrian experience/access in greyfield redevelopments. The ULI outlines a set of principles addressing these points as well; the most critical pedestrian/auto suggestions follow:

- Consolidate driveways and interconnect parcels so that the automobile and pedestrian movement are possible without going out onto the arterial highway; halving the number of access points results in about a 30% decrease in the accident rate.

- Use supporting road systems and frontage roads to provide opportunities for parallel movement along the corridor.
- Limit curb cuts; curb cuts are inefficient and dangerous for both motorists and pedestrians.
- Design and manage the strip to limit vehicular and pedestrian conflicts. (Beyard and Pawlukiewicz, 2001).

Addressing the matter of parking necessity and the introduction of mixed-use zoning/development are universally applicable and necessary in any greyfield redevelopment attempt. The following redevelopment alternatives, however, build upon these basic assumptions and provide more specific development scenario strategies for greyfield sites.

The Lifestyle/Town Center

One of the more popular scenarios in tackling the problem of greyfields, is simply to start over. Older shopping centers “from Winter Park, Florida to Lafayette, California are being razed and replaced with mixed-use residential intertwined with pedestrian-oriented streets”, hinting at our updated definition of greyfields. Specifically, we note that “even discount and power centers are being redesigned with a human face” (Ewing, 2000, pg. 20).

In the wake of mall decline and the ubiquity of the power center, a new vernacular was added to the American retail experience: the lifestyle center. Appearing in the first decade of the 21st century, lifestyle centers are a new type of retailing model, based on the storied main streets of America, and one that “leverages tradition by seeking to re-create a streetscape abandoned a generation ago” (Gillem, 2009, pg. 14). The lifestyle center harkens back to the heyday of American main streets as the economic and symbolic centers of civic life. Moreover, the lifestyle center is proving most successful in suburban bedroom communities where there is often a lack of a traditional or historic downtown.

The International Council of Shopping Centers defines the lifestyle center as any open-air shopping mall containing at least 50,000 square feet of (upscale/specialty) retail space (Scholl & Williams, 2005). The typical design of a lifestyle center calls for a central street, mimicking the main streets of the past, flanked by a linear commercial, and usually mixed use, zone. These zones provide ample sidewalk space along the interior main streets with the buildings facing entirely inwards towards these streets,

simultaneously providing a sense of enclosure and an ‘urban’ experience for those within, while turning a blank, featureless wall to the outside. These elements have opened the cracks for critique however. Steven Bodzin argues, “this new retail format is made to appear more like a main street but is isolated behind a moat of parking. It’s relationship to the surrounding town is the same as if it were a conventional indoor mall” (Bodzin, 2003).

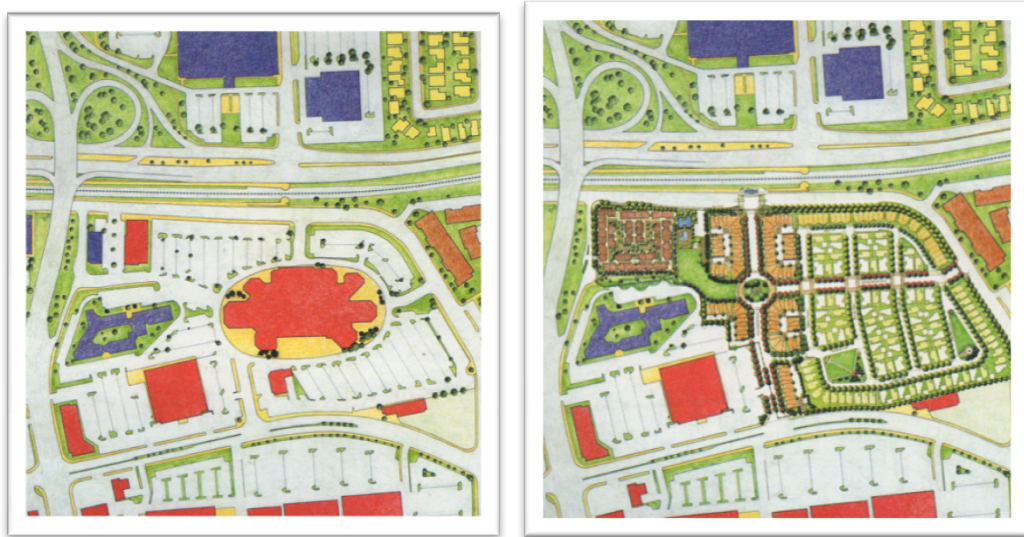


Fig. 1 & 2: The basic idea for greyfield conversion into lifestyle/town center format.

Regardless of perceptions versus realities, this model of development has flourished. Michael Southworth attributes the demand for these lifestyle center typologies to the oversaturation of enclosed malls within American retail. Thus people “have become bored with the inwardly focused, disconnected and placeless suburban shopping center” (Southworth, 2005, pg. 152).

In an increasingly dynamic and competitive retail world, any sort of edge is utilized to lure the consumer. Mark Gillem argues that lifestyle centers have arisen in response to the new realities of the 21st century consumer, one in which people must multitask, have little time, and greatly desire convenience. The lifestyle center, with its heavy-handed historical main street imagery, symbolism, and a combination of shopping, dining, entertainment and housing, becomes popular because “it simulates a more complete urban experience” (Gillem, 2009, pg. 16). This simulated urban experience allows the consumer to feel a sense of regaining civic involvement and the social experience that main streets once provided, in a convenient, one-stop-shop package.

Beyond the superficial facades and feel good nostalgia of lifestyle centers, there is an economic argument to be made. Compared to more traditional enclosed malls, lifestyle centers are considerably cheaper; construction costs are lower than those of enclosed malls when considering materials (asphalt streets vs. tiled walkways) and maintenance costs (no HVAC required for outdoor streets and sidewalks). From a land use perspective, because lifestyle centers do not require large anchors and can include structured parking, they may be built in smaller footprints than regional malls, making them ideal for not only greenfield development, but urban brownfield redevelopment as well. Additionally, and perhaps most compellingly, the sales per square foot of lifestyle centers typically surpass those of more traditional shopping centers (at \$298 sq ft. vs. \$242 sq. ft.) (Grant, 2004).

Emerging from this first generation of lifestyle centers, is an even newer and growing trend called the main street hybrid. These hybrid main street/lifestyle centers

incorporate both an auto-oriented anchor (including even cinemas or a grocery store) and a pedestrian oriented main street; these hybrid centers can be located within older redeveloping areas, or follow the new, town center style format of lifestyle centers in undeveloped areas (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001, pg. 208). Like the original model of lifestyle centers, hybrids must also adhere to the principle of mixed uses, including civic, residential, retail and office.

New Development

It would be naïve to believe that the processes of suburbanization can be reversed entirely. Peter Calthorpe explains that although small stores remain, the overall trend, not surprisingly, is one that is moving towards convenience shopping. This convenience (at least in suburban settings), until other realities change, is inherently entwined with automobile accessibility and agglomeration retail configurations. Calthorpe continues that newer, larger, big box type stores “will resist Main Street configuration, demanding the market area and visibility of a major arterial” and so to respond to this need, “hybrid town centers [retail centers] should combine the intimacy of Main Street with the accessibility of strip centers” (Calthorpe, 1993, pg. 22). This is possible, and in fact, already being done.

An alternative to the ‘nuclear’ option model of a complete teardown and town center rebuild is to incorporate, add to, and reimagine existing retail spaces at obsolete greyfields and power centers. However, the lessons learned and principles utilized in the lifestyle center are still relevant in this alternative approach.

The second scenario for greyfield redevelopment calls for what the ULI deems as an integration of the “Main Street with the Mall.” The introduction of new developments within existing ones attempts to bridge the divide between obsolete style malls and power centers with the growing trend of consumers’ desires for more intimate shopping experiences. The Congress for the New Urbanism refers to this new development approach as “mall plus.” The mall plus model of redevelopment retains most, if not all of the existing retail structure, allowing for design improvements such as open spaces and

pedestrian connections between uses. Most importantly, the mall plus/new development approach repositions the greyfield with the addition of mixed uses: office, hotel, residences, entertainment, etc (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2005, pg. 12).

Regardless of name, this approach follows many of the basic principles of placemaking outlined previously, namely the introduction of pedestrian oriented streetscapes, mixed uses, and the elimination of surface parking lots. The new development approach is applicable to both malls (see the Valencia Town Center, CA as an example) and big box power centers, which will be examined in more detail in a following case study.

The new development approach harnesses the economic and attraction power of existing retailers and anchors (if there are any) and introduces new elements, retailers, and uses that are intended to strengthen the allure of the existing, not detract or compete with it. The ULI considers this approach an integration of the main street with the mall because it meshes many of the principles and elements of the lifestyle center. The idea of a nostalgic main street shopping experience, with the realities of much of suburban shopping center real estate is paramount here.

The first step in the physical transformation of the new development approach is to consider and improve entrances and approaches to the existing shopping center. In the new development formula, this will most likely take the form of a new main street style central drive from the neighborhood or other developments to a terminal at the old shopping mall/center. This new street will be lined with new buildings, retail, residential and/or office, filled with the previously described elements of placemaking (landscaping, signage, etc). New streets and developments will occur in existing surface parking lots;

improvements and new revenue streams will then pay for the construction of covered, structured parking, as called for by the ULI and CNU (Booth et al, 2001).

This new development approach extends not only to physical buildings and improvements, but also too event and entertainment development. At the Valencia Town Center Mall, the developer created new civic events such as a film festival and art festivals in order to create a community destination and memorable place for the shopping center. Additionally, even smaller scale new developments can be made, such as the introduction of public art and landscaping to improve overall aesthetic design and complement a more human scale. The ULI notes, in the example of the Valencia Town Center Mall, the addition of these new developments, improvements and options in retail and experiences induced a subliminal habit of repeat visitation for consumers (Booth et al, 2001).

Building on the ‘main-street-meets-the-mall’ philosophy of the ULI, the new development approach also includes the incorporation of long-term developable plots within the larger development, also known as ‘pad sites’. This introduces the possibility of phased build-outs, necessary for long term visioning. The inclusion is critical because “land developers now typically seek permits for over 100 acres...with one master plan.” In master planned, single-phased entire build outs, “rather than the architectural diversity of incremental growth, we [get] large blocks of development with formula configurations dictated by the past successes of each developer and by conservative financing criteria” (Calthorpe, 1993, pg. 22). Pad sites and the subsequent dividing of land, break down the

monotony of single use and oversight and introduce a very important new characteristic-time.

While the introduction of pad sites and flex space to an existing shopping center may fall within a greater master plan, these individual sites open opportunities for variations in use, style, and aesthetics which can only come from the added element of time. As new flex spaces and pad sites come online over a period of time, each will be essentially built to suit, reflecting the changing characteristics and demands of consumers at the given time. This differs from lifestyle centers in that it avoids the potential for a “themed” micromanaged and designed look. From an economic perspective, it gives developers the opportunity for long term leasing sites.

Adaptive Reuse

The last development strategy proposed may be best realized in smaller suburbs and towns or in economic downturns. While creating new lifestyle centers and injecting new development requires substantial capital investment and market demand, an adaptive reuse of big box greyfield sites offers a more conservative and less costly approach.

The basic premise behind adaptive reuse is rather intuitive; it is a reuse of existing building and infrastructure through various (smaller scale) physical improvements or tenant changes. An adaptive reuse renovation may include the addition of natural lighting, new entrances, landscaping and signage (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2005, pg. 11). This model of greyfield renovation retains the existing structure and only alters it for another single use (i.e. civic uses like a church or library, corporate offices, or other retail formats). It is important to note that taking an adaptive reuse approach to greyfield redevelopment introduces no mixed-use facilities, an element that is deemed critical for long-term renovation success.

An adaptive reuse of existing buildings may not be ideal in all situations; as Steven Bodzin cautions, “in order to enhance financial performance, mall owners often expand, renovate, or re-tenant the existing mall structure. Some owners have reconverted these failed regional malls into data centers or offices. None of these approaches allow for the urban synergies created by a mixed-use strategy” (Bucher 2002, pg. 48). This may not necessarily be completely true however. Though examples of turning big boxes and greyfield malls into housing and traditional mixed used centers have not yet been

realized, there are plenty of examples of creative, innovative and diverse reuses of big box sites at greyfields.

Concerning these big box reuses, “the primary objection [to renovating a big box] is that the site is culturally toxic...probably imposed upon the town with such corporate voracity that [people may] question whether the building should even be there in the first place” (Christensen, 2008, pg.119). Such deep seeded feelings will be difficult to overcome. The consequences from a lack of public outreach and input in the initial planning of these big box power centers may echo even in redevelopment attempts. This would be an opportune time for public engagement, a chance to bridge sentiments between citizens and site. Julia Christensen reinforces this idea, explaining that “when a community reuses a big box building, the people remain connected to the building they once knew as shoppers, but the connection takes on a new form” (Christensen, 2008, pg. 120).

It is important to note that in all three of the revitalization scenarios presented, the unifying element is the role of public agency in any redevelopment attempt. Steven Bodzin of the CNU explains, “the public role in greyfield revitalization can include reducing risk and expediting permits and approvals, both of which lower costs. In addition, many developers received government incentives through tax increment financing, bonds, condemnation, land assemblage, land acquisition, and infrastructure enhancements” (Bodzin, 2003).

The principle focus of adaptive reuse will be the rehabilitation and remodel of obsolete big box stores due in part to their plentifulness in suburbs and towns, their

ownership's general hesitance in upgrading these stores (preferring instead to move and build somewhere else), and their relative ease in ability to transform into another use.

Chapter 4:

This chapter introduces three distinct case studies for the consideration of greyfield redevelopment. Mizner Park, the Washingtonian Center and Gateway Shopping Center all offer a unique approach in greyfield redevelopment strategy. While the geographical and economic context of each case study differ, many of the recommended principles for successful redevelopment (outlined by the ULI and CNU) will stand out as universal.

CASE STUDY: WASHINGTONIAN CENTER (GAITHERSBURG, MARYLAND)

Situated in the forested hills of the tech corridor in suburban Washington, D.C. not far from the classic new urbanist modeled Kentlands, lies the Washingtonian Center. Fronting I-270 and two other major arterials, the Washingtonian Center lies at the confluence of several transportation routes, easily accessible by automobile, a prime spot for a suburban shopping center.

The Washingtonian Center bills itself as 760,000 square feet of “main street retail” as well as Gaithersburg’s premier shopping, dining and entertainment center. The shopping center is focused around a lake, which lends itself to a ‘waterfront’ moniker, even offering paddleboat roads around the lake (Peterson Companies).

In 1997, as part of a larger 6 million square foot suburban campus development, the Washingtonian Center was the last remaining segment (of 23 acres) to be developed. What sets the Washingtonian Center apart from other main street town center models is that the developer required that the center incorporate big box retailers; retailers traditionally only associated with stand alone buildings or as part of power centers. This retail format blending would be the first model of its kind in America.

The project design focus is built upon two central themes, a large 10-acre lake as a visual and recreational centerpiece, and a main street development emanating from the feature lake. On the other end of the lake stand hotels, office and entertainment features. At the ‘main street’ end of the lake, a plaza was constructed to be both a town center and a terminus for the main street. Utilizing elements of placemaking, the plaza includes a

landmark clock tower, public art, landscaping and seating; the plaza holds small community events as well. The three main big box retailers (Target, Galyan's, Kohl's) anchor the main street at both ends and in the middle, creating a boomerang curvature in the street, apparent in the figure below. In another first, the big box anchors were asked to alter their typical store format slightly, creating a two-story format with slightly smaller footprints.

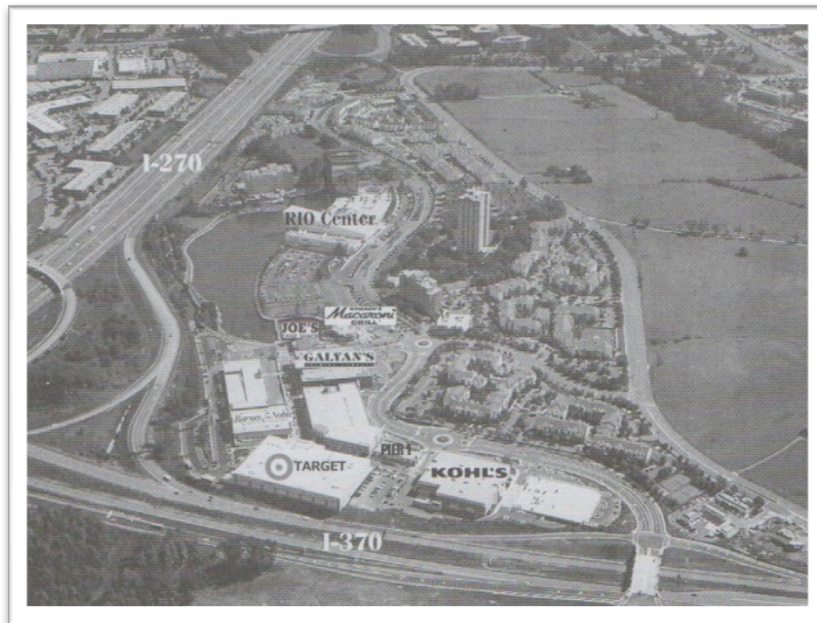


Fig. 3: Aerial of Washingtonian Center.

The three separate big box stores are treated as distinct architectural landmarks, both anchoring the main street economically and visually (similar to a traditional indoor mall), but also providing diversity, vitality and interest to the main street urban fabric. To tie the big box stores into the scale of the main street, visual elements such as signage, windows and entrances are incorporated to the street level floors, adding unique identity (Booth et al, 2001).



Fig. 4: Town center and street retail at Washingtonian Center.

In terms of parking, the Washingtonian Center follows the principles outlined by the CNU and ULI. The main street, at only 75 feet in width, allows for on street parking and ample sidewalk width. The small scale of the street and curvature create both visual interest and a sense of safety for the pedestrian. Most of the parking is provided in three garages tucked behind shops and restaurants and with direct connector pedestrian bridges into the big box retailers, facilitating more direct access at the request of the retailers.

The Washingtonian Center proves with success, that it is possible to marry the ideals of the lifestyle center, the elements of place, community and diversity with the commonplace big box retail format. This case study provides us with a model that is perhaps more accessible and feasible for many of our suburb's greyfield power centers and strip malls.

CASE STUDY: MIZNER PARK (BOCA RATON, FLORIDA)

A classic example of greyfield redevelopment that planners often turn to is Mizner Park in Boca Raton, Florida. This is for good reason. The story of Mizner Park demonstrates one of the earliest, and most successful instances of greyfield mall conversion.

The original site of Mizner Park was once the Boca Raton Mall, a 28- acre, 430,000 square foot, traditional enclosed mall built in 1974 (Valley, 2001). Built in what was once the geographic center of the city, Boca Raton Mall began to wane as the city growth boundary pushed westward and the newer (and larger) Town Center at Boca Raton was built, which ate into the market share of Boca Mall.

By the 1980's it was clear that the Boca Raton Mall was in irreversible decline. In response, the Boca Raton city government created the Boca Raton Community Redevelopment Agency, which was comprised of civic and business leaders as well as private citizens. To further aid the redevelopment agency, "the downtown area eventually was designated a blighted area and a \$50 million program was launched to improve the downtown infrastructure" (Valley, 2001). By 1987, the plan for redevelopment of Boca Raton Mall was in place, and by 1989 the original mall structure had been completely demolished. Crocker & Co., a local and respected real estate company, led the public-private redevelopment.

Beginning in 1989, the first phase of Mizner Park was a \$60 million investment which saw the first mixed use elements- residential, retail and office

space. Today, there is “an additional 104,000 sq. ft. of commercial office space...located above the ground-floor retail on one side of the street, and more residential units...located above the retail space on the opposite side. The project site was completed in 1998 with the construction of the seven-story Mizner Park Office Tower at a cost of \$25 million. In total, there are now 272 apartments and townhouses on the site and 165,000 feet of Class A office space (Valley, 2001).

The physical layout of Mizner Park closely follows the principles of the new urbanist lifestyle center. A linear street system, tied in with the existing neighborhood street grid, delineates pedestrian scaled blocks while a unified architectural style, lush landscaping and a grand parkway, terminating at an amphitheater, translate into “main street” elements. Street parking and parking garages hidden behind residential and retail street frontages further exemplify the characteristics of the lifestyle center. Andres Duany, addressing the ultimate success of Mizner Park, explains that people are attracted to it because of its physical “superiority,” enticing people to come regardless of whether or not they actually need to shop. Duany adds that “[Mizner Park’s] desirability stems from the carefully shaped public space it provides, as well as its traditional mix of uses: shops downstairs, offices and apartments above” (Duany, 2000, pg. 28). In its completed state, Mizner Park, still situated amongst its original 28 acre site, now contains 236,000 square feet of retail space, 260,000 square feet of office space, 272 rental units, and a museum, amphitheater and art museum for civic space (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2005).



Fig. 5: Central promenade and retail at Mizner Park.

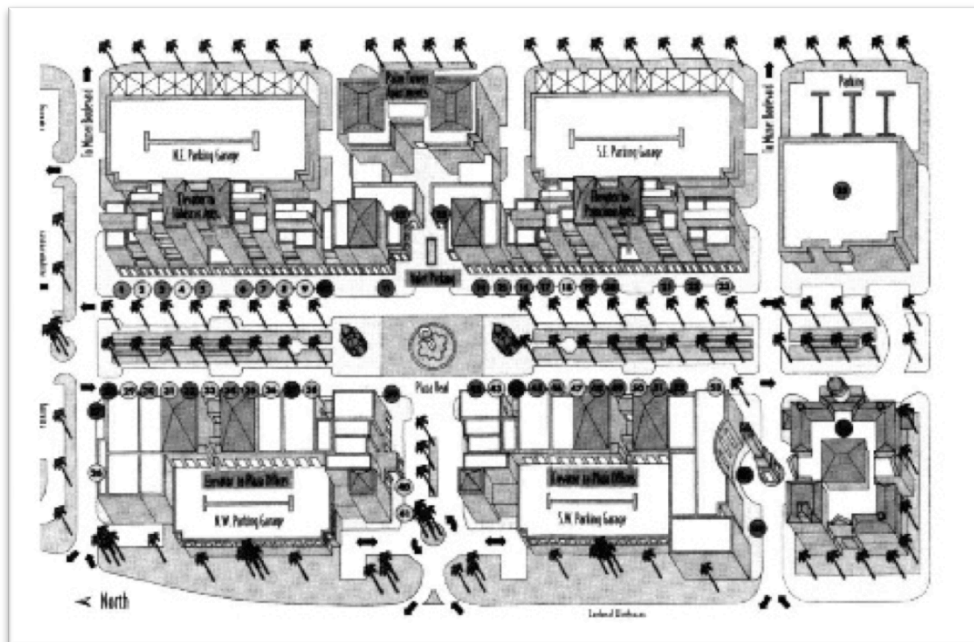


Fig. 6: Layout of Mizner Park.

Economically, Mizner Park has been a resounding success. By 2001, only three years after completion, retail sales at stores that had been in the center for all 12 months averaged \$556 per sq. ft., which was more than twice the national average (Valley, 2001). The new “main street” of Mizner Park has far outperformed its suburban competitors; becoming a tourist attraction in its own right (Duany, 2000). Duany, a vocal advocate for the main street oriented lifestyle center, contends, “when well designed and well managed, this sort of mixed-use main street retail is more profitable to own than the strip center or the shopping mall” (Duany 2000, pg. 28). Mizner Park stands out as a model even among other mixed-use projects because two-thirds of the site is devoted to public areas, with the land all owned by the city of Boca Raton (Valley, 2001).

At final build out, Mizner Park now contains 498,000 square feet of retail and office space, an increase of nearly 68,000 square feet from its former incarnation of Boca Raton Mall (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2005). The economic incentive for redevelopment speaks for itself; using a denser, multi-use model approach for redevelopment, developers and Boca Raton have not only added office and retail space but also added a residential revenue stream. It should also be noted that the Urban Land Institute, the International Council of Shopping Centers and even the Sierra Club of Florida, have all admonished praise and recognition upon Mizner Park.

The story of Mizner Park, particularly the fact that the entire site is owned by the city, with two-thirds of its land devoted to public use, has profound implications for greyfield sites. The success of Mizner Park demonstrates that suburbs and cities do not simply have to hand over all means of control and incentives in order to remove their greyfield blight. Public involvement, at least in the case of Mizner Park, will reap public use; smart planning and integration between the city and the developer ultimately fills the coffers of both.

APPLICATIONS: GATEWAY SHOPPING CENTER (AUSTIN, TX)

Set amidst the heart of Austin's booming northwest "Golden Triangle" suburban corridor lays the Gateway Shopping Center. Anchoring part of a much larger retail and commercial district, Gateway offers an exercise in suburban greyfield redevelopment because it embodies both the physical retail aspects of declining shopping centers, and the ideal location for redevelopment.

Built in 1993, the Gateway Shopping Center consists of four "quadrants" (Gateway Courtyard, Gateway Market, Gateway Square and a multiplex movie theater), making up 513,000 square feet of retail space on nearly 50 acres (Denney, 2012). The Gateway Shopping Center, owned and operated entirely by Simon Property, is situated at the confluence of three major highways (Loop 1, Highway 360, and Highway 183) and several arterials, making it easily accessible to a wide and affluent suburban demographic. Although Simon Properties describes the Gateway Shopping Center as a community and lifestyle center, (it does contain several specialty retailers), in shape and function, it is essentially an evolved big box power center (Simon Property Group, 2013).



Fig. 7: One of the recognizable architectural elements of Gateway.

Within 3 miles of the Gateway center are almost 98,000 people with an average household income of over \$83,000; within 5 miles of the shopping center, the trade area population is just over 260,000 with an average household income of almost \$82,000 (Simon Property Group, 2013). The demographics would appeal to almost any retailer and yet Gateway is declining, with over 100,000 sq feet of its retail space now vacant. Gateway shopping center now stands at only 81% of its leasable capacity, falling under the 84% vacancy threshold deemed necessary to characterize it as a greyfield site. Though the shopping center was built in 1993, a year after the recommended cut-off for greyfield condemnation (based on age alone), the vacant space, sheer scope and size and pressure from nearby competition are enough to qualify Gateway as susceptible to becoming a greyfield, if not one already.



Fig. 8: Vacant spaces in Gateway Shopping Center.

The Gateway Shopping Center has been in decline for the last decade. This has been due in large part to the numerous other shopping centers that have been constructed in the immediate area since Gateway's construction. Many of these newer shopping centers are in the same retail model format as Gateway- big box, power centers whose 'newness' has been alluring for Gateway's retailers. While Gateway maintains many of its anchor stores, including Crate and Barrel, REI, the Container Store and Best Buy, the shopping center was dealt a severe blow in 2013 when Whole Foods, the principle

anchor, announced it was moving to a newer and larger location in the Domain, a lifestyle shopping center only a mile away (Denney, 2012).

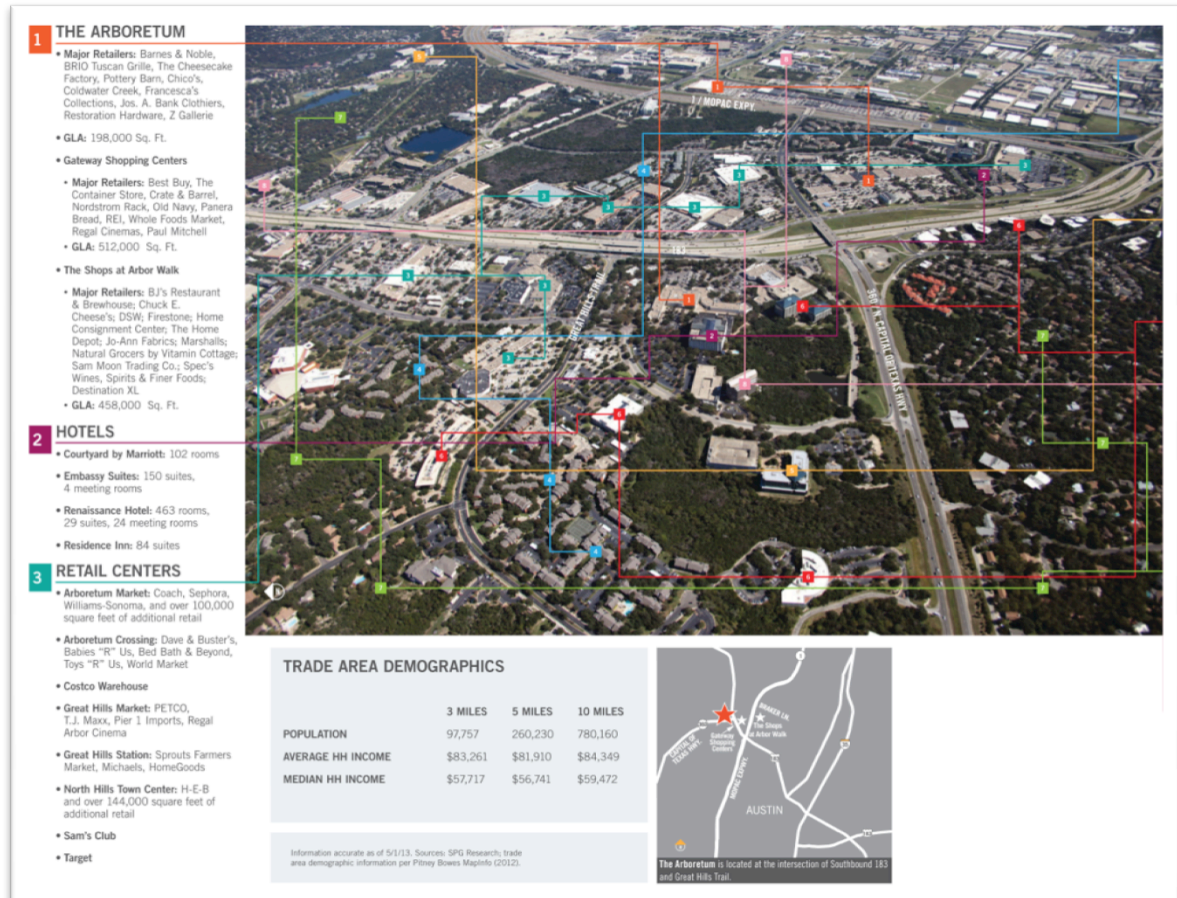


Fig. 9: Showing the larger retailing district presents intense competition for Gateway.

Using City Guidelines as Strategy

Gateway now finds itself within the larger narrative of Austin's rapid urbanization and the city's attempt to shape new growth into dense, urban neighborhoods. Imagine Austin, Austin's new comprehensive city plan, and the North Burnet/Gateway Master Plan, have targeted the Gateway area for redevelopment following new, suggested urban guidelines. Imagine Austin outlines "areas located along a north-south axis of the city and in the North Burnet/Gateway planning area...in the northern portion of the city [are] identified as most likely to develop or redevelop" (City of Austin, 2012). The city of Austin is determined to create places where Austinites have options- options to travel, commute, live, work, and play. These places are to be developed into what the city is calling "regional centers."

Under *Imagine Austin*, the city has defined a regional center as:

the most urban places in the region. These centers are and will become the retail, cultural, recreational, and entertainment destinations for Central Texas. These are the places where the greatest density of people and jobs and the tallest buildings in the region will be located. Housing in regional centers will mostly consist of low to high-rise apartments, mixed use buildings, rowhouses, and townhouses. However, other housing types, such as single-family units, may be included depending on the location and character of the center (City of Austin, 2012).

The North Burnet/Gateway Master Plan further specifies the vision for redevelopment of the area in the future, in line with the principles outlined by Imagine Austin, through additional land development regulations and standards. The North Burnet/Gateway (NBG) Master Plan combined the respectable neighborhoods into a singular planning area, commencing a planning process when the city council passed Resolution no. 020117-27 in January of 2002 (City of Austin, 2007).

The basic elements that have been outlined for future development in the Gateway area must adhere to the following guidelines:

- Encourage high quality design, connectivity, and a mix of uses to begin accommodating Central Texas Region's expected population growth over the next 30 years.
- Introduce dense housing types such as townhomes and condos to accommodate more residents with less land.
- Integrate housing above commercial to create transitions into surrounding neighborhoods.
- Expand the existing street network to improve mobility and access within North Burnet/Gateway while providing enhanced connections to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Redevelop City of Austin parcels to serve as catalysts for Transit-Oriented Development.
- Encourage multi-story mixed use buildings oriented toward new multi-functional streets rather than highways and access roads.
- Provide direct pedestrian links to rail stations and other transit uses in the district.
- Encourage active and livable places that serve our daily needs and provide people with a sense of belonging and ownership within their community (City of Austin, 2013).

Additionally, the city has identified the Gateway shopping center, within the North Burnet/Gateway planning area, as commercial mixed-use zoning. Austin has defined commercial mixed use as the following:

Commercial Mixed Use (CMU) - Subdistrict
Commercial Mixed Use is a high density mixed use subdistrict in the NBG Zoning District. It allows for development such as high density residential, high rise office and entertainment complexes, destination retail and large scale civic uses (City of Austin, 2007).

Prior to the adoption of the North Burnet/Gateway Master Plan, the Gateway shopping center could never develop into a denser urban model; the maximum floor-to-area (FAR) building ratio allowed was only 2:1. Under the master plan revision, the FAR was increased to 3:1 with development bonuses available to further increase that ratio

(site and conditions permitting). The building height implications of this zoning change allowed heights to increase from 48' to 180' with development bonuses able to further increase this maximum.

In the NBG Master Plan, the city of Austin has included a preliminary master plan build out and redevelopment for the Gateway area. The Gateway Shopping Center area (outlined below) has essentially been given the lifestyle/town center redevelopment approach. The existing shopping center has been removed, and in its place, a more traditional, urban and denser street network of smaller blocks and mixed uses has been created.



Fig. 10: Gateway Center site at town center build out.

Proposed Plan

As an alternative, what is presented below is a “new development,” or “mall plus” approach. The basic proposal for the redevelopment of the Gateway shopping center attempts to combine both the visions and guidelines for the North Burnet/Gateway planning area with the previously defined principles for greyfield redevelopment. This is being coined a “new development” approach because the suggested proposal for the redevelopment of Gateway capitalizes on the existing infrastructure, retailers, and landmark elements of Gateway shopping center as it stands today, while adding new uses, public space, and leasable areas.

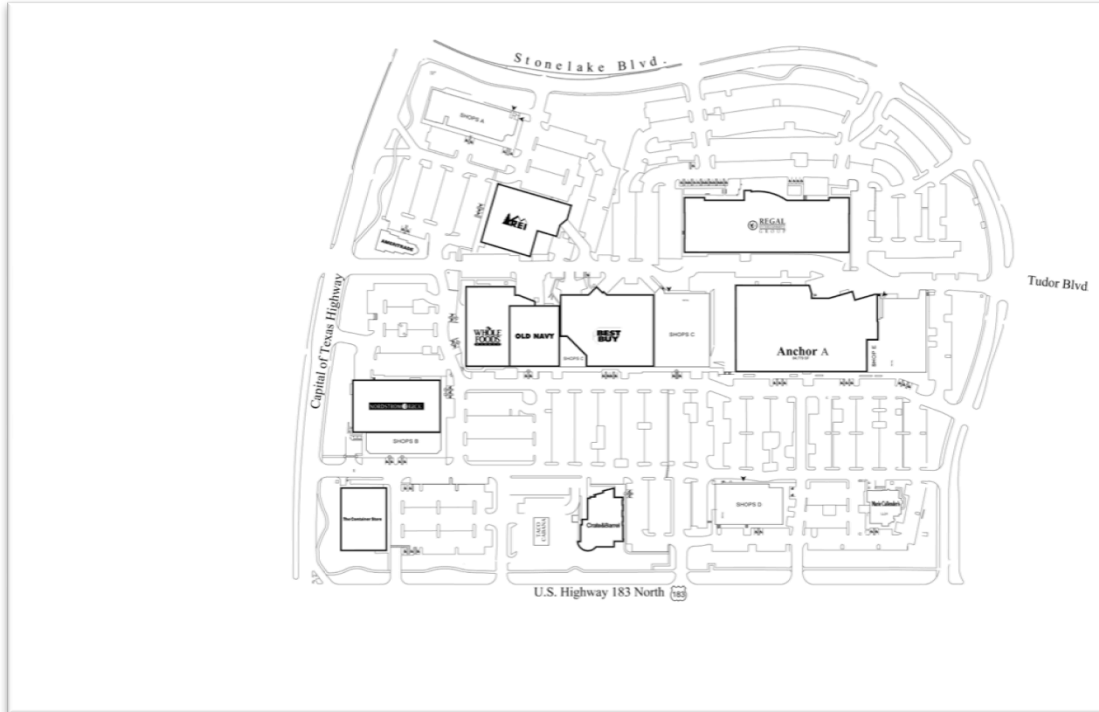


Fig. 11: Gateway as existing today.



Fig. 12: Proposed changes to Gateway.

To redevelop the Gateway Shopping Center, cues from Mizner Park, the Washingtonian Center and the principles of greyfield redevelopment (prescribed by the ULI and CNU) will be employed. The focus of redevelopment will be comprised of two parts. The first, based around the introduction of new mixed uses, new transit networks, and existing site enhancements. New mixed uses will include expanded retail space, office space, and residential units. The second part of redevelopment focuses on centering

these new developments around existing successful big box stores (as was demonstrated is possible in the Washingtonian Center),

It is important to note that in this redevelopment proposal, new street blocks will be created, allowing individual sites to be built out in phased construction. In this proposal, only two pad sites, and two underperforming (currently vacant) big box stores have been removed. Eliminating the vacant big box store (adjacent to Best Buy) was necessary to facilitate better automobile and pedestrian flow to the theater as well as create open space. The redevelopment of surface parking lots has provided ample opportunity for new mixed uses and comprises the majority of new space and redevelopment focus.

One of the problems with Gateway, as it stands today, is with connectivity and access. In the proposed changes, several entrance/exits points have been removed along the 183 Highway Frontage Road. These existing entrance/exit points cause heavy traffic backlogs onto and from the one-way frontage road. New, centralized drives and street networks create a more formal sense of entry and better internal traffic flow. A central drive from the 183 Highway Frontage Road to the theater has been created, visually and physically joining the once separate “quadrants” of the greater Gateway Shopping Center. In addition, a new retail space and theater entrance on the northwest side, facing this new drive is recommended. This will provide theater access and exposure to the 183 side of the Gateway district.

Green space and landscaping will also be an integral part of the redevelopment. New park/green space in front of the theater gives open space access to residents of

Gateway while providing visibility from the arterial road for the theater. The green space in front of the theater and the new green space in the middle of the existing center will be constructed over the existing surface parking lots. Flanked by buildings and street networks, these open spaces will become the visual, and potentially programmatic town centers, able to host community events. Enclosure, destination and amenity will all evoke a sense of place.

Parking will be moved and expanded with the construction of multistory parking structures to ensure that there will be no loss to parking ratio incentive. In terms of landscaping, street trees and plantings (adhering in size and type to guidelines in Imagine Austin) will line most streets. Shade and a more pleasant pedestrian ambiance will result.

Most retail and office-oriented garage parking is situated along the frontage road of 183, insulating interior buildings and pedestrian networks from highway sight and noise pollution.

The few significant and existing architectural and landmark features of Gateway are incorporated (such as the decorative ‘towers’). Utilizing existing features capitalizes on the site history of Gateway while instilling a sense of continuity and recognition of place in the new redevelopment. These elements, in combination with landscaping, are the most cost effective and easiest methods of placemaking.

Finally, the addition of residential units, in the form of multifamily and/or townhomes, are located furthest from the 183 highway (for noise and pollution purposes), and create a more urban street wall along Stonelake Boulevard. Residential zoning along the border ties Gateway into the context of the larger neighborhood with a softer edge,

than commercial or retail would be. Finally, the incorporation of residential development into Gateway ensures a more 24/7 economically driven, and neighborhood oriented atmosphere to the once single use shopping center.

Chapter 5:

CONCLUSIONS

As was noted in the original CNU and PWC report on greyfields, any redevelopment attempt does not necessarily translate into a real estate success guarantee. Though there are a myriad of unique outlying factors facing each suburban shopping center, successful stories of redevelopment, such as Mizner Park, the Washingtonian Center and a host of others prove that declining and classifiable greyfield shopping centers do not equate to economic death warrants.

The format of retail centers, like the cities, towns, and suburbs they inhabit, will continue to evolve and mature. As this paper has articulated, we must adapt our definitions to better reflect the swift, changing nature of the retail development industry. The principles and proposals of retail redevelopment, such as placemaking, outlined by the CNU, ULI and others are indeed universal; however, they are also ideas meant to be blended, molded, and used subjectively for each unique greyfield site. Not every greyfield redevelopment will lead to a mixed-use town center or urban district, but other development options can still benefit from aspects of the mixed use, neighborhood-based redevelopment models that have been discussed. Other reuse scenarios can still promote a walkable environment, renew the block and street structure, or incorporate other new urbanist principles. Above all, it is always important to approach any design in a way that is sensitive to the needs, assets, and problems of the surrounding community.

The words of Peter Calthorpe echo the story of successful greyfield redevelopment- “the scale of modern development cannot be ignored, concealed, or

denied...[it can however], be responsible to and contribute to a larger civic order” (Calthorpe 1993, pg. 23). This responsibility to the civic order, to the greater urban whole and how we live has never been represented by something so clear as the story of the suburban shopping center. In our attempts at greyfield redevelopment, we cannot afford to be entirely formulaic. We must be careful not to be merely a hollow nostalgic nod to a main street Americana in places where that never existed, or turn a blind eye and a blank wall to the surrounding community. Greyfields represent the greatest opportunity for reclaiming our suburban landscapes, and thus deserve newer, more encompassing and thoughtful approaches.

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VITA

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